**Frederick J Timms**

Frederick J Timms, born in Watford on 21 January 1897, was the eldest son of Frederick and Rosina Timms, who had nine children, one of whom died in infancy. His father, born in Aldenham, was a cowman and farm labourer. The family lived initially at 122 St Albans Road, Watford but Rosina came from Bushey and their three youngest children were born there, so the family may have lived in Bushey for a few years. By the time of the 1911 census they had settled at 51 York Road, Watford and Frederick, aged 15, was employed as a blacksmith’s labourer.

Frederick joined the Royal Navy as Ordinary Signalman J/24187. On 27 May 1915 he was killed in a massive explosion on board the steamship *Princess Irene.* He was 18. He was buried in grave 987 at the Gillingham Woodlands Cemetery in Kent.

The steamship *Princess Irene* was built to the order of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company for their luxurious "Triangle Route" linking Vancouver, Victoria and the American city of Seattle but in 1914, before she was able to leave for the Pacific, was requisitioned by the Royal Navy and converted into a Minelayer. Based at Sheerness in Kent, she was in the River Medway on 27th May 1915 when she blew up as a result of a catastrophic internal explosion. There was only one survivor. The *Princess Irene* had a complement of 225 officers and men, three of whom were ashore that morning as the mines were being primed on the ship's two mine decks. Also on board was a party of 80 or so Petty Officers from Chatham, in addition to 76 Sheerness Dockyard workers who were completing tasks prior to the ship's planned departure to lay her mines on 29th May.

Without warning, the ship was blown to pieces and her remains, and the remains of those on board, were scattered over a wide area of the surrounding river and countryside. One of the Chatham Dockyard workers, David Wills, amazingly survived the explosion but few bodies were found. Those that were located were buried in Woodlands Cemetery in Gillingham. A memorial to those lost in the disaster is situated opposite Sheerness Railway Station.

The cause of the disaster was thought to have been due to a faulty primer (pistol) although evidence at the Official Enquiry showed that the work of priming the lethal mines was being carried out in a hurry by untrained personnel.

Source: *Blown to Eternity - The Princess Irene story* (Ferry Publications) by John Hendy.



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